

The background of the entire cover is a dense, chaotic web of black ink scribbles and lines on a brown, textured surface. The lines vary in thickness and direction, creating a sense of movement and complexity. Some lines form rectangular shapes, possibly representing windows or architectural elements, while others are purely abstract and swirling.

*bluestreak*

# does Your House have Lions?

s o n i a   s a n c h e z

"Sonia Sanchez is a lion in literature's forest. When she writes she roars, and when she sleeps other creatures walk gingerly."

—Maya Angelou

## **OTHER WORKS BY SONIA SANCHEZ**

Wounded in the House of a Friend

A Sound Investment

I've Been a Woman

Under a Soprano Sky

Homegirls and Handgrenades

Love Poems

*Sonia*

DOES YOUR HOUSE HAVE LIONS?

*Sanchez*

BEACON PRESS  
BOSTON

to Barbara who shared her family and  
Orcas Island with me and  
to all my sisters who have lost their brothers to AIDS.

One day in the late sixties, I was on the phone with Rahsaan and mentioned to him that just that day I had bought a house. He responded by asking, “Does your house have lions?” I said, “What?” He said, “Lions. You know, like in front of a museum or the post office. You know, concrete lions. My house has lions. Get a house with lions.”

JOEL DORN

May 1993

from the *Rahsaan Roland*

*Kirk Anthology*

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sister's voice

brother's voice

father's voice

family voices/ancestors' voices

*sister's*

*voice*

this was a migration unlike  
the 1900s of black men and women  
coming north for jobs. freedom. life.  
this was a migration to begin  
to bend a father's heart again  
to birth seduction from the past  
to repay desertion at last.

imagine him short and black  
thin mustache draping thin lips  
imagine him country and exact  
thin body, underfed hips  
watching at this corral of battleships  
and bastards. watching for forget  
and remember. dancing his pirouette.

and he came my brother at seventeen  
recruited by birthright and smell  
grabbing the city by the root with clean  
metallic teeth. commandant and infidel  
pirating his family in their cell  
and we waited for the anger to retreat  
and we watched him embrace the city and the street.

first he auctioned off his legs. eyes.  
heart. in rooms of specific pain.  
he specialized in generalize  
learned newyorkese and all profane.  
enslaved his body to cocaine  
denied his father's signature  
damned his sister's overture.

and a new geography greeted him.  
the atlantic drifted from offshore  
to lick his wounds to give him slim  
transfusion as he turned changed wore  
a new waistcoat of solicitor  
antidote to his southern skin  
ammunition for a young paladin.

and the bars. the glitter. the light  
discharging pain from his bygone anguish  
of young black boy scared of the night.  
sequestered on this new bank, he surveyed the fish  
sweet cargoes crowded with scales feverish  
with quick sales full sails of flesh  
searing the coastline of his acquiesce.

and the days rummaging his eyes  
and the nights flickering through a slit  
of narrow bars. hips. thighs.  
and his thoughts labeling him misfit  
as he prowled, pranced in the starlit  
city, coloring his days and nights  
with gluttony and praise and unreconciled rites.

***brother's***

***voice***

father. i despise you for abandoning me  
to aunts and mothers and ministers of tissue  
tongues, nibbling at my boyish knee.  
father. forgive me for i know not what they do  
moving me backwards through seams of bamboo  
masks, staring eyes campaigning for  
my attention. come O lords; my extended metaphor.

sister. i am not your true brother  
one half of me resides in my mother's breast  
in her eyes where tears exceed their worth.  
the other half walks on tiptoe to divest  
his tongue of me, this father always a guest  
never a permanent resident of my veins  
always a traveler to other terrains.

mother. i love you. you are my living saint  
walking inside my skull you multiply out loud  
in dainty dreams seraphim smiles without a tint  
of mystery. you move among us with dark  
gait intrepid steps that disavowed  
retirement from an elaborate sex  
while you prepared each morning's text.

the sermon for each day was my father  
husband who left you shipwrecked with child  
the movie of the week was my father  
staring out from philco screens while your wild  
dreams of nouveau lady genuflecting in single file  
in a southern city of mouths on mascaraed thighs  
twentieth century of elasticized lies.

what does a liver know of peace  
or spleen. kidneys. ribs. be still my soul.  
how does a city broker its disease  
within the confines of a borough, where control  
limps tepid—like carrying a parasol  
of hurts, hurting, hurted, hurtful croons  
stranded in measured arenas without pulpits or spittoons.

came the summer of nineteen sixty  
harlem luxuriating in Malcolm's voice  
became Big Red beautiful became a city  
of magnificent Black Birds steel eyes moist  
as he insinuated his words of sweet choice  
while politicians complained about this racist  
this alchemist. this strategist. this purist.

came the rallies sponsored by new york core  
came Malcolm with speeches spilling exact and compact  
became a traveling man who revived the poor  
who answered with slow echoes became cataract  
and fiesta became future and flashback  
filling the selves with an old outrage  
piercing the cold corners with a new carriage.

then i began an awakening a flowering outside  
the living dead became a wanderer of air  
barking at the stars became a bride  
bridegroom of change timeless black with hair  
moist with kinks and morning dare  
then i began to think me alive with form and history  
then i made my former life an accessory.

how to erect respect in a country of men  
where dollars pump their veins?  
how to return from exile from swollen  
tongues crisscrossing my frail domain?  
how to learn to love me amid all the pain?  
how to look into his eyes and be reborn  
without blood and phlegm and thorn?

***father's***

***voice***

the day he traveled to my daughter's house  
it was june. he cursed me with his morning nod  
of anger as he filtered his callous  
walk. skip. hop. feet slipshod  
from 125th street bars, face curled with odd  
reflections. the skin of a father is accented  
in the sentence of the unaccented.

i was a southern Negro man playing music  
married to a high yellow woman who loved my unheard  
face, who slept with me in nordic  
beauty. i prisoner since my birth to fear  
i unfashioned buried in an open grave  
of mornings unclapped with constant sight  
of masters fattened decked with my diminished light.

this love. this first wife of mine, died in childbirth  
this face of complex lace exiled her breath  
into another design, and i died became wanderlust  
demanded recompense from friends for my heartbreak  
cursed the land for this new heartache  
put her away with a youthful pause  
never called her name again, wrapped my heart in gauze.

became romeo bound, applauded women  
as i squeezed their syrup, drank their stenciled  
face, danced between their legs, placed my swollen  
shank to the world, became man distilled  
early twentieth-century black man fossilled  
fulfilled by women things, foreclosing on my life.  
mother where do i go before i arrive?

she wasn't as beautiful as my first wife  
this ruby-colored girl insinuating her limb  
against my thigh positioning her wild-life  
her non-virginal smell as virginal her climb  
towards me with slow walking heels made me limp  
made me stumble, made my legs squint  
until i stopped, stepped inside her footprint.

i did not want to leave you son, this flame  
this pecan-colored festival requested me  
not my child, your sister. your mother could not frame  
herself as her mother and i absentee  
father, and i nightclub owner carefree  
did not heed her blood, did not see my girl's eyes  
shaved buckled down with southern thighs.

now my seventy-eight years urge me on your land  
now my predator legs prey, broadcast  
no new nightmares no longer birdman  
of cornerstone comes, i come to collapse the past  
while bonfires burn up your orphan's mask  
i sing a dirge of lost black southern manhood  
this harlem man begging pardon, secreting old.

i was told i don't remember who  
i think i was told he entered his sister's house  
cursed me anew, tried to tattoo  
her tongue with worms, tried to arouse  
her slumbering veins to espouse  
his venom and she leaned slapped him still  
stilled his mouth across early morning chill.

rumor has it that he slapped her hard  
down purgatorial sounds of caress  
rumor has it that he rushed her down a boulevard  
of mad laughter while his hands grabbed harness—  
like her arms and she, avenger and she heiress  
to naked lightning, detonated him, began her dance  
of looted hems gathering together for his inheritance.

blood the sound of blood paddling down the road  
blood the taste of blood choking their eyes  
and my son's body blood-stained red  
with country-lies, city-lies, father-lies, mother-lies,  
and my daughter clamoring to exorcise  
old thieves trespassing in an old refrain  
conjured up a blue-black chord to ordain.

*wa ma ne ho mene so oo*  
*oseeeyei, oseeeyei, oseeeyei*  
*wa ma ne ho mene so oo*  
he has become holy as he walks toward daresay  
can you hear his blood tissue ready to pray  
he who wore death discourages any plague  
he who was an orphan now recollects his legs.

*wa ma ne ho mene so oo:* he is arising in all his majesty  
*oseee yei:* a shout of praise

*family*

*voices*

—

*ancestors'*

*voices*

## *brother's voice*

there is nothing i do not comprehend  
i have become a collector of shouts  
hold my ears father, i have come to mend  
our hearts raise a glass celebrate root out  
lyrical slaughters become your only son devout  
i have become a lover of sweet water  
i worship stone i will not betray you father.

## *father's voice*

steady your hand old man do not trouble  
yourself with language, stalk his wound  
he is listening to your corpuscles cradle  
the clap and thunder of a new sound  
he has called your name and old teeth are found  
can you hold me son, as i rise from this whimper  
can you hear me son, as i cross over this river.

## *father's voice*

i am preparing for his coming, i sit on my flesh  
i am wealthy my limbs free of moths  
i am in praise of convalesce  
i will stand free of the walking sabbaths  
i will return sermons crowded with cloths  
i am learning how to talk to my son's dust  
i have tossed my net toward a future trust.

*ancestor's voice (male)*

do you remember me,	huh?
when our teeth were iron,	huh?
did you drum about me,	hey?
and not babylon,	hey?
did you take your weapon,	huh?
rattle it on any mattress,	hey?
til you became powerless?	hey, huh, heyyyyyyyyy?

*ancestor's voice* (female)

do you remember me,	ayyyyyyy?
when our wombs were cerebral,	ayyyyyyy?
did you dream about me,	ayyyyyyy?
and not betrayal,	ayyyyyyy?
did you take your coastal	
blood to any playground	ayyyyyyy?
to every resident clown?	ayyyyyyyyyyyyyyy?

*sister's voice*

let the spirit raise up echoes in my spine  
brother. let our histories bleed no boomerangs  
let my accent shrink the itch of undermine  
brother. let our mouths speak without harangue  
let my journey sing a path they sang  
O i will purchase my brother's whisper.  
O i will reward my brother's tongue.

## *ancestor's voice* (female)

have you prepared a place of honor for me?  
have you recalled us from death?  
where is the *mmenson* to state our history?  
where are the griots the food my failed breath?  
where is the morning path i crossed in good faith?  
what terror slows your journey to this dawn?  
have you prepared a place for us to mourn?

*mmenson*: orchestra of seven elephant tusk horns used on state occasions to relate history

*ancestor's voice* (male)

water from my feet i return to you  
oceans from my eyes to drown your bones  
i am turning my heart away from you  
hundreds of years have passed with no memorial stones  
how can i forgive myself without the ritual horns?  
your stool sits too long at this testimony  
your stool forgets the flesh of ceremony.

## *brother's voice*

i travel to India, father, Sai Baba says i must return  
home seeking the light of the soft stone smile  
i travel to India, father, Sai Baba says my turn  
has come to prostrate pray reconcile  
my soul with him who enters single file  
i worship the light of the timid ground  
i walk wide-eyed through blue slits of sound.

## *brother's voice*

sister tell me about this marriage crown  
you wear, tell me how to claim it all without fanfare  
i want children, dreamers of the upside down  
i want children screamers with kinky hair  
i want a rocking chair child for my heir.  
sister i want my tongue curling forward with this  
while my face flows full with promise.

## *brother's voice*

sister tell me about this cough i cough  
all of my skin cradled in this cough  
my body ancient as this white cough, i cough  
all day and night i'm haunted by this cough,  
a snake rattles in my throat this cough, i cough  
a scream embalms my chest with cough  
sister an echo surrounds my lungs with this cough, i cough.

## *brother's voice*

i linger in stethoscopes and thermometers at Lenox Hill  
i have entered the hospital to test  
the cough and temperature making me ill  
i have entered this hospital to rest  
and all i have discovered is unrest  
the doctor says happily it is not pneumonia or cancer  
the doctor says my temperature is like a trickster.

*ancestor's voice* (male)

it is necessary to remember the sea  
never forget how it leaps out of nowhere  
it is necessary to remember the sea  
holding your ancestors in a nightmare  
of waves smooth breasts of warfare  
is there no anguish no balm of Gilead for the dead?  
is there no amulet for this coming dread?

*ancestor's voice* (female)

why won't you stand up  
show us how to dare  
why won't you stand up  
investigate this nightmare  
show us how to prepare  
your children's eyes stand at attention  
your children's eyes itch for resurrection.

*ancestor's voice* (female)

drink this tea  
(bitter-heyaaaa?) as bitter  
as my bones hugging the sea  
pour salt into the laughter  
of eyes popping out of water  
tears sail down my one eye  
ornamental anger parts my smile.

## *sister's voice*

come down to my house in philadelphia man  
what you need is a cleansing of the body  
come down to philadelphia where i can fan  
your blood cool take custody  
of your infection flood it into frailty  
come down and i will defend your skin  
against the threat of constant confession.

*brother's voice*

i checked myself out of the hospital  
sister. i'm back at work on a new skyscraper  
i'm piecing together the city in a recital  
of steel and windows. no rice paper  
walls here to destroy my design. no bootlegger  
wires light this expensive east-side dwelling  
up here, my limbs sequester themselves in lightning

## *father's voice*

i'm leaving this message on your voice mail  
your brother's back in the hospital temperature 105  
i've called his mother, she arrives tomorrow wholesale  
the doctors wait for me at every corner they arrive  
with stationary voices tracking the sweat-hive  
of his body embroidering needles on his veins  
i pray his corpuscles learn how to abstain.

## *father's voice*

where to go?  
where to go today?  
where to have gone at some ago  
time when he was at play  
in the world? what kind of day  
is this where a son's body bleeds feces?  
what kind of day anoints his flesh with effigies?

*ancestor's voice* (female)

i hear the water whistling in squads  
of blue comings, the ocean has become a thief  
i see our souls transported, lightning rods  
of apocalyptic disbelief  
the sea opens and shuts with our grief  
new fathers have come to record their loss  
old fathers know this accustomed chaos.

## *mother's voice*

i am here my baby in your hospital room  
i am here my love i have kissed your morning breath  
i have walked around your father's gloom  
i have come straight to see you grazing near death  
you are hot at the edge of this city's wealth  
the doctors praise your courage your ancestral smell  
the doctors record your body's constant betrayal.

## *mother's voice*

i have waited all day for this stepdaughter  
i have made a special time for her voice  
she is late, talking on her own to another doctor  
i must prepare my tongue for the proper choice  
of words, make my eyes full, moist.  
i will let them operate on his diminished body  
i will indulge their hands in this new fantasy.

## *daughter's voice*

mothermothermother  
dead when i was one  
stepmotherstepmotherstepmother  
alive with overdone  
let his final days be a monotone  
no cuttings no more stabbings of arms and legs  
no resident tubes to collect these final dregs.

*brother's voice*

O forgive me mother  
O forgive me father  
O forgive me sister  
O forgive me fever  
O forgive me tremor  
O forgive me rumor  
O forgive me terror.

*brother's voice*

dress me in white  
not hospital white  
dress me in white  
of my ancestor's white  
of Sai Baba's white  
of my morning white  
of my spirit's white.

## *brother's voice*

i am going out of my cell  
i am ready  
ring the bell (3 times)  
i am ready  
I have fitted my legs with mercy  
my eyes say no requiem  
*mangi dem, mangi dem, mangi dem*

*mangi dem*: goodbye (i am going)

## *Brother's voice*

hold me with air  
breathe me with air  
sponge me with air  
whisper me with air  
comb me with air  
brush me with air  
rinse me with air.

## *brother's voice*

i come. doctor.  
*mangi nyo.* captor.  
i come. inventor.  
*mangi nyo.* censor.  
i come. preacher.  
*mangi nyo.* confessor.  
i come. ancestor.

*mangi nyo:* i come

## *ancestor's voice*

FEMALE *jamma ga fanan*

MALE look at his eyes. is he Asian?

FEMALE *jamma ga fanan*

MALE look at his hair. is he Indian?

FEMALE *jamma ga fanan*

MALE look at his cheekbones. is he Native American?

FEMALE *jamma ga fanan*

MALE look at his hands. is he African American?

*jamma ga fanan*: good morning

## *ancestor's voice*

FEMALE *nyata?* how much is this death rattle?

MALE *nyata?* he is not owned by anyone here or there.

FEMALE *nyata?* how much for this bundle of applause circling his everywhere?

MALE *nyata?* how much for the walking air?

FEMALE *nyata?* how much for him to share this blue ash?

MALE *nyata?* how much for him to share the calabash?

*nyata:* how much

## *ancestor's voice*

FEMALE    where are the gods when we need them?  
MALE       they are stammering someplace off camera.  
FEMALE    where are their masks, their substitute emblem?  
MALE       they rustle in weeds like an old dilemma.  
FEMALE    where is Buddha? Allah? Jehovah? Ptah? Ra?  
MALE       will their tongues acknowledge us one day?  
FEMALE    will their cobwebs remember us one day?

## *ancestor's voice (family)*

TO BE SUNG

MALE	<i>sala maleikum</i>	hello
FEMALE	<i>nanga def</i>	how are you?
MALE	<i>sala maleikum</i>	hello
BROTHER	<i>magni fi rek</i>	i am well
BROTHER	<i>dama buga lek</i>	i want to eat
BROTHER	<i>dama buga naan</i>	i want to drink
MALE/FEMALE	<i>kai fi African</i>	come here African
MALE/FEMALE	<i>kai fi African</i>	come here African
BROTHER	<i>mangi nyo</i>	i am coming
BROTHER	<i>mangi nyo</i>	i am coming
BROTHER	<i>mangi nyo</i>	i am coming . . .

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